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Love poems

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LOVE POEMS

by W. R. TITTERTON

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TO
MY WIFE
AND COMRADE,
HERMINE HEJDE TITTERTON.

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The Poem—"These Being Dead yet Speak" has already appeared in "The New Age." The other poems are printed for the first time.

TO LOVE.

What art thou Love, that all the world should praise
thee ?

And yet that causest lovers cheeks to pale ?

What pleasure dost thou bring that men should
raise thee

Anthems of gladness, weaving many a tale
Of them that love, and love without avail,
And fall wan-eyed and weak before thine altar,
Before that steadfast gaze that does not falter
For song triumphant or for bitter wail ?

(Chorus of Worshippers)—

O hail, Love, hail !

Hail ! though with anguish sore our hearts be aching
For love that comes not, and for love's forsaking,—
All hail ! All hail !

Master of Life wherever lips are meeting,
Bringer of joyful tears and bitter laughter,
Of joy eternal,—yet for ever fleeting,
Lord of our hopes and fears, here and hereafter,
(What were Life or Death, if love should fail ?)
Hail ! Master, hail !

These being Dead
yet speak.

THESE BEING DEAD YET SPEAK.

In the street, in the black night watches,
We ply our trade.
By the hands of our body-defilers
Our wage is paid.
They that gaze on corruption
Unafraid.

The wares we offer are rich,
Though the price be high,—
Body and soul we sell you
Until we die.
Are these nothing to you,
Ye that pass by ?

Are the wives ye have gotten loveless
And cold to-night ?
Come to our warm embraces
And taste delight !
Should we answer your purpose as well
If our souls were white ?

Body and soul as white
As once they were
When our voice and the lark's were one,

And life was fair,
Ere ye came with your lust and your gold,
And left despair.

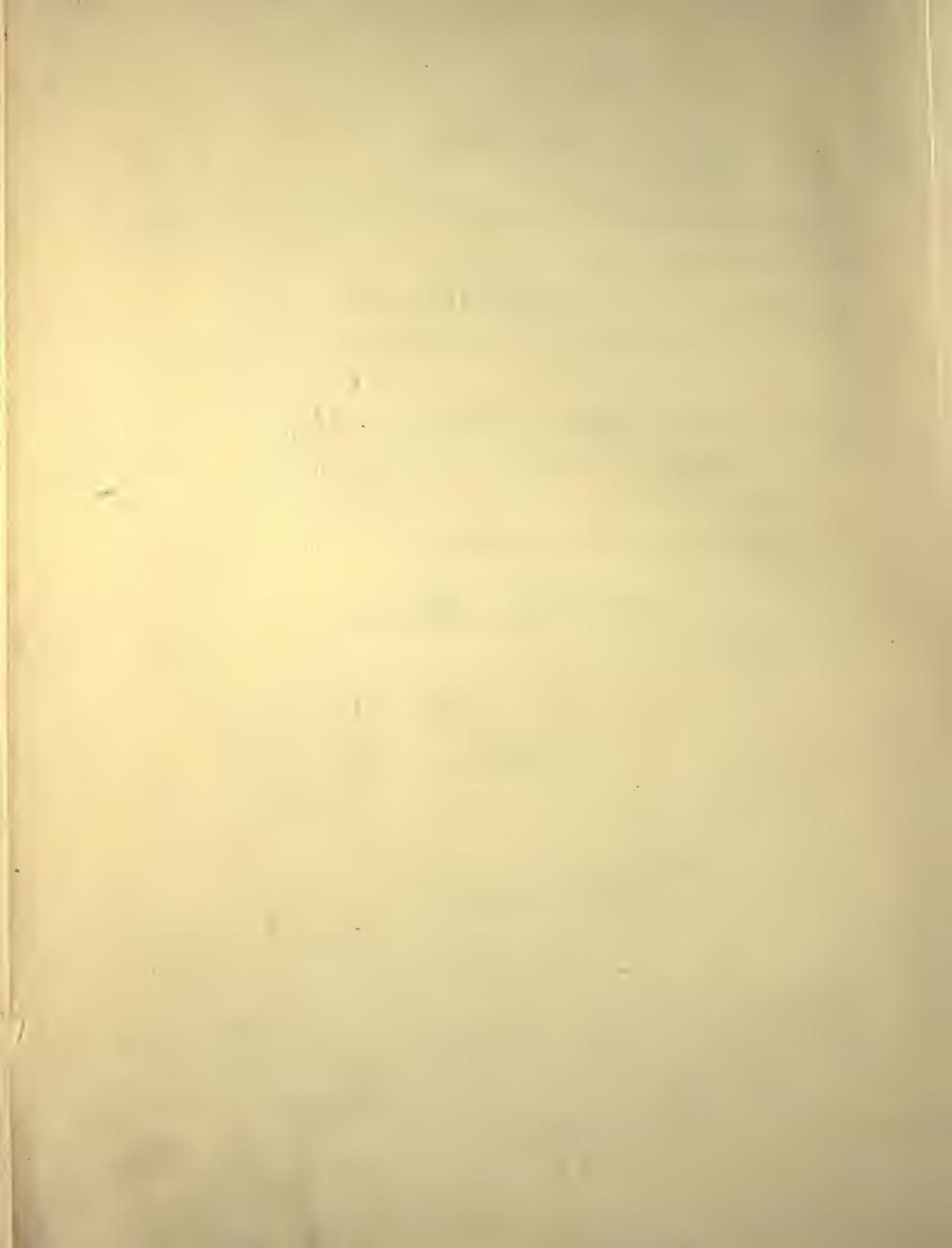
Despair that awakens whenever
We stop to think,
Till peace flows into our veins
With the stuff we drink.
Peace! Good God! as we totter
On Hell's sheer brink.—

O'er which we peer through the darkness,
And spy beneath
The worm at his work (in the place
Of the living death),
That ends when the merciful pillow
Ends our breath.

Do your women, your white-souled saints
Seem so much to you
That you worship them, label them ' holy '
And ' pure ' and ' true '?
Isn't it funny? dear Christ!
We are women too!

They shrink from our tainted touch
In the city throng,
And stare as they saw us not
As they sweep along.
We do not shrink, we gaze in their eyes,
And our hate is strong.

In vain, O wives of our body-defilers, in vain,
Do ye give us your shuddering pity, or cold disdain.
The gift we took from our lovers
We give again.
Lo ! on your flesh—and your children's—
The brand of Cain !



The Forerunner.

THE FORERUNNER.

There was a man of old time who had great possession
Even all that the heart desireth,
Yet had he no joy in Life,
And peace was ever far from him.

So he came to a maiden of his city and said :
“ O maiden behold me a chief among men,
Having all that the heart desireth.
Yet have I no joy in Life, and my days pass
Even as the days of the traveller in the desert
Even the desert where no water is.”

Then said the maiden
“ Hard is thy case
Tell me now the cause of this thing ! ”

Silent stood the man,
As one that would speak and cannot,
And his tongue clave to the roof of his mouth,
Till of a sudden speech came to him,
And he said :—
“ It is that I lack the fair body of a woman
In which I might have delight.”

Then the maiden struck him on the mouth, and cried,
" Get thee gone !
Lo, in the streets of the city wait fit mates for thee.
Hearken how they call to their lovers !
Get thee gone ! "

Said the man,—“ O maiden
Unto such have I been,
And it chanced that she whom I greeted
Was pale even beneath the powder of deception,
But desire was strong upon me,
So I took her hand,
And we two passed into the darkness.

“ Now, in the morning, I awoke before her,
And I looked upon her face,
And behold it was like the valley of Death,
On her brow were the marks of many sorrows,
And the corners of her mouth were turned downwards,
As are the mouths of them that suffer and cannot weep.

“ Then she too awoke,
And I saw her eyes were like stars—
Stars shining in the darkness of the night

“ Said I—wondering,—
‘ O thou, art thou happy ? ’
Then she struck me, even as thou, O maiden, and
cried,—
‘ Man, mock me not !
Thou hast had thy will,
Pay me my money and get thee gone ! ’

“ But even with the fall of her voice,
She caught my hands in her two hands,
Saying ‘ Stay !
Stay while I curse thee and thy fellows.

“ ‘ I loved
And was loved not.
And the lust of him the loved one went—
And ever I longed for love.

“ ‘ And now many lovers come . . .
I press them to my breast—
Though I loathe them.
I kiss them—
Though the spittle of contempt is upon my lips.
And ever I long for love.
I ! the slave of lust ! the hack of pleasure !
Even I long for love.

“ ‘ ‘ Man, I was fair,—
Thou hast made me foul.
I was pure,—
Thou hast made me vile.
Thou hast taken me from my people,
And placed me in a hovel where thou canst find me
at thy need.
I who seek the love thou canst never know,
I curse thee ! I curse thee O man ! ’

“ Therewith she raised her hand as if to strike
And from her eyes came flashes of blinding light,
So that I feared her greatly,
And, hastily paying her money, I went my way.

“ And now,
When desire is again upon me,
I have come to thee O maiden,
Thou hast no flashes of fire darting from thine eyes,
But hast a fair fresh body,
And eyes of tenderest blue.
O maiden, have pity !
Have pity on my desire ! ”

Silent stood the maiden, musing.
After a while, she said,—

“ Hast thou ever loved ? ”

“ Nay,” said the man.

Said she, “ I wait for my lover,

And when he shall come,

He will beget upon my body

Them that shall be glad upon the earth when we are
at rest.

I keep my body pure until he come.

O man, what is thy desire ? ”

No answer made the man.

But gazed as one who, from Hell depths,

First sees lost Heaven afar off in the heights

She took his hand, and said,

“ Lo, brother, we be two watchers

Waiting for love’s dawn.

Who knows upon whom first His light will shine ? ”

Said he,

“ How shall a man see the sunburst from the abyss ? ”

Said she,

“ To love all things are possible.”

And she kissed him on the brow.

LONGING.

All night and day I long for you,
Of you I dream the dull days through,
Oh best beloved of my heart.
Over the seas my longings dart,
To hear you pray " Dream, dream come true ! "

And I ? God knows I pray so too,
" Come, come, love, come ! " as if there grew
Strength from the prayer to heal the smart
Of night and day.

Ah God, ah God ! if one but knew
The road for home ! could find the clew
Out of this maze ! Oh why apart
Stay we that love ? Tell me dear heart.
What can I do alone, what do
With night and day ?

I SEE HER PASS.

I see her pass along the street,
The raindrops splash her dainty feet,
Mud splashes o'er her lifted skirt
From bus and cab in careless spurt,
Her lank plumes shiver in the sleet.

At that snail's pace which looks so fleet,
As though one came she meant to meet,
With smiling lips and eyes alert,

I see her pass.

Hour after hour ! Dry lips repeat
Good night ! good night ! None turns to greet.
Her lips twitch with a deadly hurt,
At dragging pace, the limbs inert,
And blind eyes struggling to entreat,

I see her pass.

To My Lady
of the Talons.

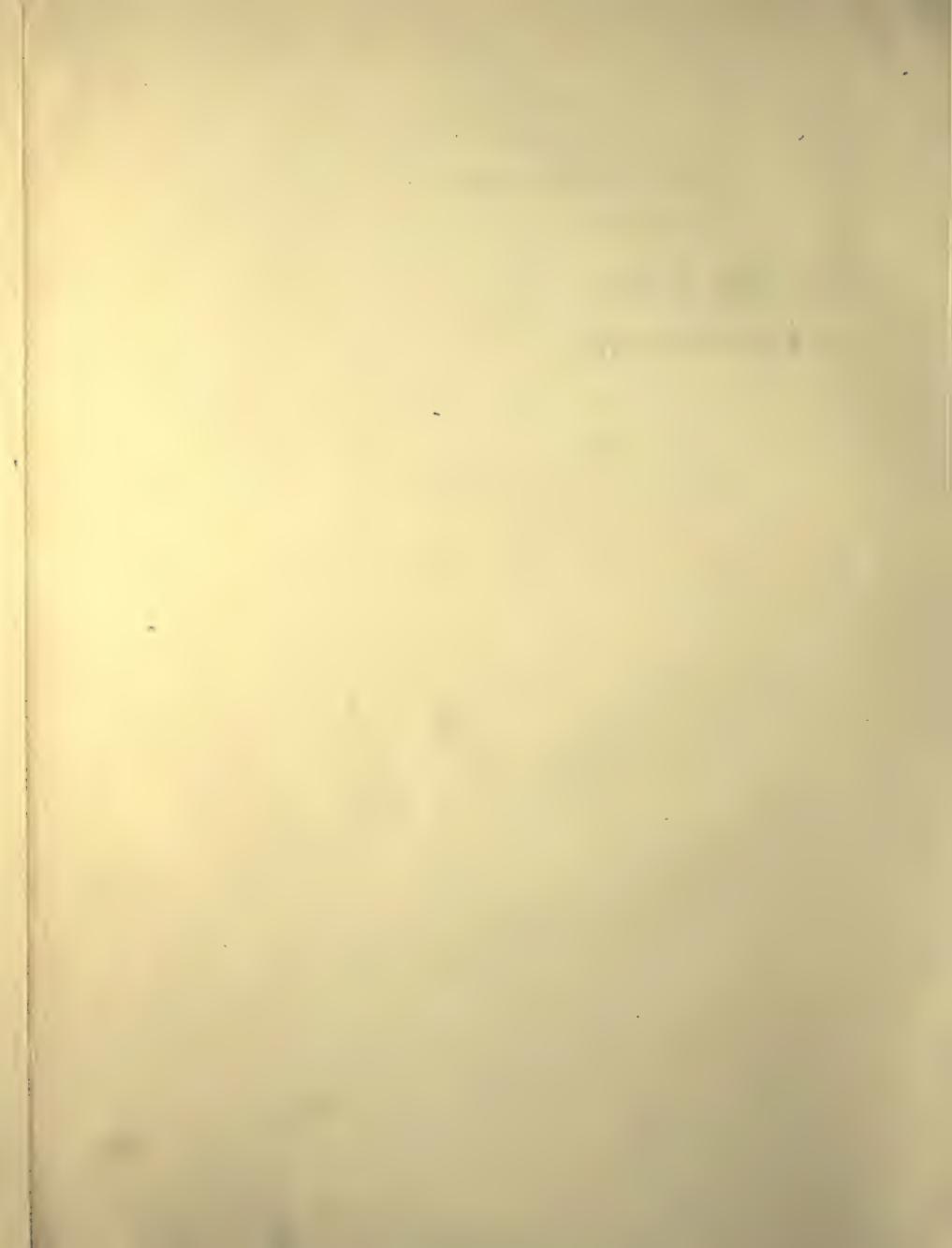
TO MY LADY OF THE TALONS.

Where got you that cold Eastern smile of yours,
That springs so oddly to those sensuous lips,
Full of warm perfume and the glow of wine ?
The old world pirates of the Great Sea shores,
Their eyes bent landward from their oar-winged ships,
Surely they saw and hailed you as divine,
Saw your white body glancing through the trees,
Heard music sweeter far than life is sweet,
And arms outstretched, sank on adoring knees,
And swept in unsteered wreckage to your feet.

Or did men, dreaming by the silent Nile,
See your veiled figure floating on the stream,
And watch the yellow draperies gleam and fade,
And see your face unveil, and learn your smile,
And ache with shuddering longing till the dream
Vanished, and left them longing and afraid ?
Is it your image on the shoreless sands,
Clawed as a beast is, clothed with terror and grace,
That offers to all lovers of all lands
The deadly riddle of your slumb'rous face ?

Yes, so I see you, so your body grips
Me, and all men ; and so your musical breath
Piles up your coast with broken body and spar,
And so the hidden meaning of your lips
Sleeps, till you proffer love and give men death,
Then smile, forgetting who those dead men are,
Yes, all forgetting who we be who lie,
Because of you upon the corpse-sown sod.
Bride of the corpses ! when you come to die,
Pray that your soul die, too, lest there be God.

To My Lady
of the Sorrows.



TO MY LADY OF THE SORROWS.

At the dim end of all,
When Death that is the shadow folds you round,
Shapes shall arise out of the darkening ground,
Silently coming to you at your call.

Shapes of dead lovers, they
That slept forgotten in some hidden nook,
Silent and bright-eyed, with that ardent look
You knew so well on some past happy day.

Then you'll stretch hands and cry,
Being alone for one kind word from them,
From these pale ghosts fringing the dun night's hem,
That have no greeting for you till you die.

Until these too shall fade,
The silent watchers, the dim night and all,
And there shall be a thing beneath a pall
And one without that diggeth with a spade.

Then shall these ghosts of dreams,
Shall these dead lovers take your soul snow white,
And bear it softly upward in the night,
Over the rolling earth of seas and streams.

And they shall sing this song
Unto all people and the stars that blaze,
"Lo, this is she who loved men all her days,
And ever gave herself and thought no wrong.

"And some of us gone mad
With scorching lust, have stained her and defiled,
Yet left her stainless as a little child
Because love dwelt with her and made her glad.

"Therefore we crown her queen,
And sing her praise who suffered and rejoiced.
Fair-bodied, gentle-souled and angel-voiced,
Lovers of many men, and maiden clean."

So the notes floating down,
Shall touch the dreams of men who see o'erhead
Your face, thorn-crowned, and great drops dripping
red,
And feel rose-petals falling from your crown.

Summer Magic.

SUMMER MAGIC.

All day under the trees it was noon,
All day long till the dark night came,
All day under the trees it was noon,
All day long till the peeping moon
(With great round face as yellow as flame),
Peeped o'er the hill and called our name.

“Who was it sat on a golden throne?
Sing me that song again!” she said,
As she pillow'd a place on her lap for my head,
“Who was it sat on a throne?”

*Stephen sat on a golden throne
(Oh but the wind blows cold o'er the sea!)
Fifteen counties he called his own,
Now grass grows on the crumbled stone . . .
“Fie!” she cried, “What a dirge of the dead—
Tell me a fairy tale instead!”*

“Once on a time was a boy called Jack” . . .
Then she covered my mouth with daisies.
And how can a man tell tales of Jack,
When his mouth is covered with daisies ?
“Carolling birds in the trees above
What can you sing of so fine as——”

“Now stop

Babbling empty phrases !”
And how can a man sing songs of love
When his mouth is stuffed with daisies.
(Not to mention two cherry-red lips on top,
And two wide eyes quite near.) . . .
“I love you my dear !”

Then there trembled a tear—
Came a smile instead.
“Sing me your silly old dirge,” she said.

Stephen sat on a golden throne
(*O, but the wind blows cold o'er the sea*),
Fifteen counties he called his own,
Battles he lost, battles he won,
Nothing is left but a crumbled stone.
(*What care I for the days that are done,*
So that my love is near to me ?)”

All day under the trees it was noon,
All day long till the daylight failed ;
All day long in our hearts high noon,
All day long till the great round moon.
(Crickets chirped and the night wind wailed)
Shewed us the thought in our hearts unveiled.

SO SOON!

A horseman saw you by your Arab tent,
And stooped, and swung you to his saddle-bow,
And loosed his rein and touched the horizon's rim.
Then came they hunting swiftly on hot scent,
And he with double burden all too slow,
Waited and fought . . . The kites made feast of him.
Why did you weep?

One came, all glowing eyed,
And kissed those lips, with other kisses wet—
Dead kisses from dead lips of him who died
Because he loved you.

Why did you forget?

TO PHŒBE.

Dark hair, dark eyes, white face,
Curved lip with music in it ;
Quick motions of quaint grace,
A sunny welcoming smile.
Were it not worth your while,
Oh simple song to win it ?

A little tricksy sprite
That soothes you while it vexes ;
That whips you feather-light
With gibes that do but please.
That woos you while it flees,
And laughs when it perplexes.

Body of beauteous shape,
Trim-clad in simple dresses,
How can the eye escape
That sweep from chin to breast ?
But there alas ! it's dressed,
Which leaves you, for the rest,
Unsatisfied with guesses.

AT THE CONCERT ROUGE, PARIS.

The bubble of spring water in the sun,
The cool green depths of summer-shadowed grass,
The faint quick blush of morning, just begun,
The silver tinkling chime of bells that pass
Home with the shepherd when the day is done.
She smiled,

And, lo, as in a magic glass,
I looked, and saw that all these things were one.

Salome.

SALOME.

If he had known !
Would you have danced that dance,
Oh passionate, pulsing blossom of white and red,
With those revealing veils around your flesh,
Which caught yon drunken lecher in their mesh,
And left you standing desolate here alone,
With twitching lips and venomous loving glance
Before this bloody head ?

“ If he had known !
Had known, had known,” you say.
Through set teeth gulping the quick—hissing
breath,
The while his long hair in your fev’rish hands—
(O, poisonous hair !)—you grip, and twist tight
bands
Round eyes and lips and neck and breast, and
moan,—
“ If he had known, would he have turned away
From this hot life to Death ?

“ Oh fair white flower !
O clay-cold, bodiless head
Sobbing your last blood on the pitiless stone.
O great still eyes, the light gone out of you !
O once red lips, so shrunken now and blue !
Should I not hold you living at this hour,
Lips pressed to lips, as now I press these dead
Pale lips ; if you had known ?

“ If you had known
These long white clutching arms,
Had known this soft breast aching for your kiss
This shuddering flame-shot body of desire ;
These quivering lips, these pulsing lips of fire ;
O my dead love, if you had known, had known,
Would it have come to this ?

“ Mad eyes ! Blind eyes !
Am I not beautiful ?
Am I not beautiful, you bitter lips ?
You fool ! you fool ! is not my body sweet ?
So ! so ! I hold you here where my breasts meet.
Is it not sweet, you fool, not sweet ?”

She cries.

While those dead eyes stare at her cold and dull ;
And the last blood-drop drips.

TO A WOMAN MODEL.

It is not weariness of long constraint,
I think, that makes the sudden hot tears start ;
But that thine eyes have seen so bitter a thing—
The bitter alien coldness of this ring
 Of sister faces.

‘ *Clod ! clod that thou art.*
Oh body, hawked for purchase in the mart—
Mud-smirched there (Keep still clod !)’
 Does this thought sting ?
They praise the line, admire the Greek restrain
Discuss the shadows that the muscles fling.

Dost thou with utter loneliness wax faint ?
Lo, she to whom all poets’ praises cling,
Whom these, too, worship, she who sits apart
Singing of joy, singing of sorrow’s plaint,
Thy body is a song within her heart.
Be glad, therefore, and let men hear her sing !

The Dying Knight
to His Lady

THE DYING KNIGHT TO HIS LADY.

My lady, you are tall, and very fair,
And all the graces flutter in your smile.
Your brown eyes gleam beneath your golden hair,
Like watchfires lighted in some sunset isle.
Your body is as white and delicate
As wind-strewn sculptures of new-fallen snows.
Your mouth is red as love ; as cold as hate.
So soon I learnt the first ; the last so late ;
And now death calls me, and the knowledge goes.
Bend down and kiss me O, my fair white rose.

You gave me all you could ; your passionate kiss,
Your breast to be a pillow for my head.
You gave so much. O, give me now but this—
Press lips to mine once more, e're I am dead !
Though it should hurt you, though you shudder
and turn
From touch of me that am already clay ;
Though with the shame of it your cheeks should
burn !
What of my shame, that burns my heart alway ?
Bend down and kiss me, my white rose of May.

Hearken ! men cry. " Is not this he who slew
Honour and Truth, blackened his soul with
guilt ;

Fought dastard fights until his sword-blade grew
Crusted with innocent blood up to the hilt ?
All this to gain her smile who sits by him,
Crowned with the dripping plunder of his
blows !

Yea, in our fear, God and his Christ wax dim!"
Is it not so, dear love, the good tale goes ?
Bend down and kiss me, O my fair white rose.

And yet and yet ; what should they know of
shame ?

Those careless, childish, beautiful brown eyes ?
How should they guess the smirching of my
name ?

The 'scutcheon blackened with foul fraud and
lies !

You simply saw a world, and called it good.
And longed. I gave it you. You did not say
" Where got this circlet its dark stain of blood ? "
You smiled, and held me in your arms till day.
Bend down and kiss me, my white rose of May.

Yes, love, forget ; forget the words were said !

Why should I care what men should say of me ?
Or carve in venomous truth above me, dead.

Once I had cared. Not now. Let me but see
Your face o'er mine, let me but feel the faint

Touch of your lips as my tired eyelids close.
Why did you never love me ? It is quaint !

Men have been loved for doing less, God knows.
Bend down and kiss me, O my fair white rose.

You never told me that you loved me not.

But where's the lover needing to be told ?
Haply you lusted when the blood was hot ;
Surely you loathed me when the mood was cold.
Gawds and the sceptre that my sword-strokes won,
Surely you loved these. But the giver ? Nay.
Oh, you paid wages for the service done,
And yet not all. God pays the rest to-day.
Bend down and kiss me, my white rose of May.

Bend down ! bend down ! I cannot see your
face.

Ah, but your hair is round me like a cloud !
Here let death find me ; in this close embrace,
With your white body for my burial shroud.
Dear Christ ! The evil I have done. And yet
There must be pardon for such downright blows.

* * * *

And then came pitiful death as their lips met.

As their lips met came silence and repose.

(*The dews are heavy on you, pale white rose !*)

Fulfilment.

FULFILMENT.

O love, I have waited long,
And still you have not come.
The summer's glow has changed to winter's frost,
And winter's frost melted in April showers.
But still I see you not.

I have gazed in maidens' eyes and seen their souls
Bright with high hope and gloomy with despair,
Flash scorn or mockery for my yearning gaze,
The pulse of youth has beat with keen desire ;
And comrades' hands have loving clasped my own,
That restless cast them off, while from my throat
Burst forth the sobbing murmur, " Woe is me ;
I may not clasp her hands ! "

I heard men talk of love, and straightway rose
Your image up before me with your eyes
Gleaming beneath the shadow of your hair.
And then the vision left me, and I saw
Men with hard traders' eyes and wrinkled brows.

But oh, by night, when sleep had wrapt me round,
I saw you then, my love.

With lips to lips and breast to breast we lay,
And in your eyes I saw the lovelight shine ;
While the great world faded to nothingness,
And we two there rested content, content ;
Till suddenly sleep fled before the dawn,
And I awoke alone, my love, alone.

O come, love, come ; in what shape it may be ;
Angel of heaven, devil of the pit !

If you are good, 'tis well.
If you are bad, 'tis well.

Let but the light of the covenant our souls have
sworn

Shine from your eyes ;
O, love, I will not waver.

* * * *
* * * *

O, my heart, I see you now
In the glaring streets,
Selling your soul with a smile on your lips
And a curse in your heart.
And I run to you and cry,
“ O, love, I am come ! ”

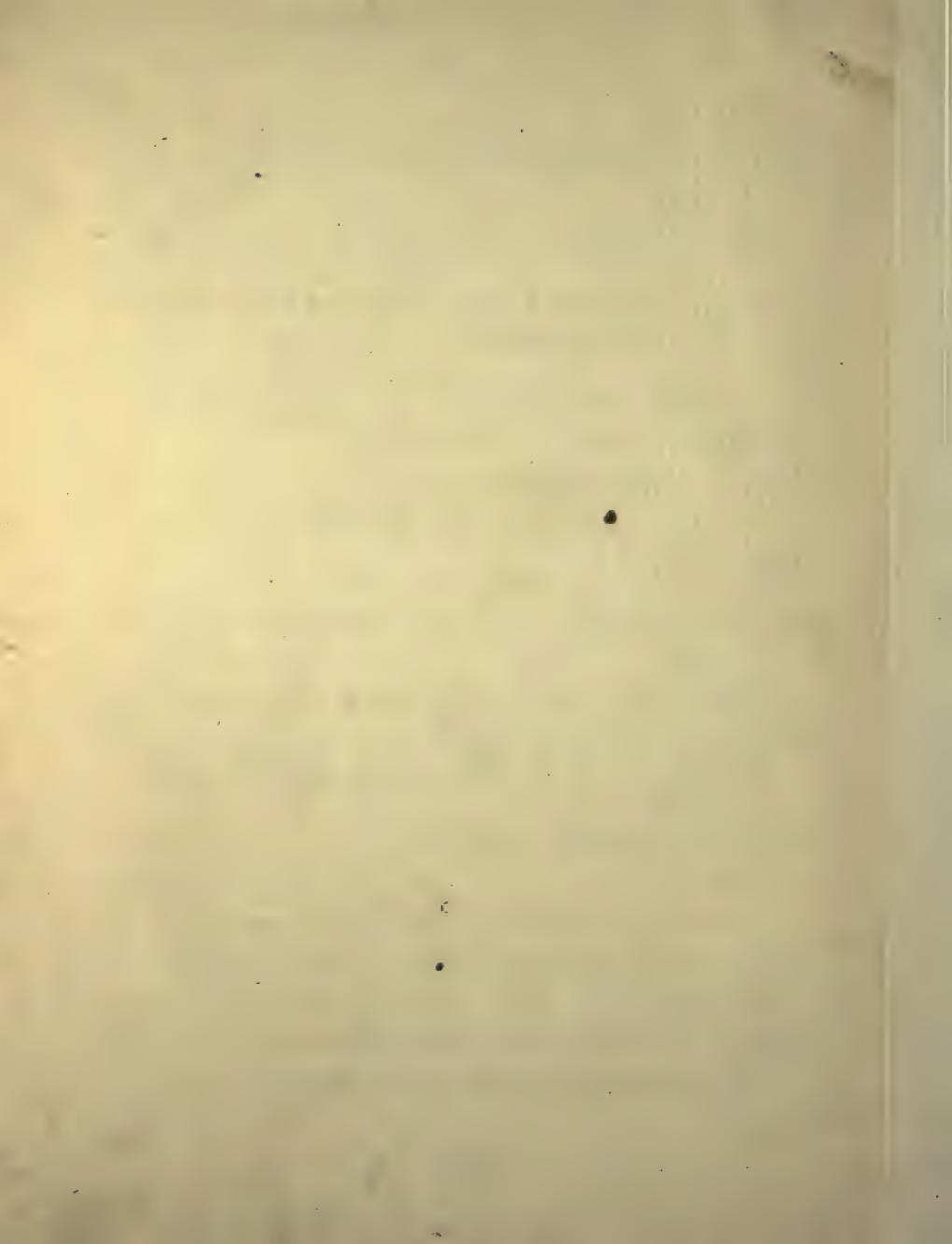
You turn yourself round with your gold-bought
smile
Till your eyes meet mine, and the flame flies
forth;
And you shrink and cry, "Too late! too late!"
And fainting fall.

O, my love, not too late!
Tenderly, tenderly I lift you up;
I soothe your rouged cheeks.
Your poor eyes open, and you gaze
Wondering up in my face.
Do not sob, my love, do not shiver;
Are you not safe here with these arms enfolding
you?
Have I not waited, my love, so long, so long?
And should I not claim you,
Though you came with your grave cloths upon
you?
Kiss me my Love! my mate!

* * * *

* * * *

Cease! sad poets, cease your melancholy song!
And break forth into carols of gladness!
For lo, out of hell have I brought my love,
And my love has raised me to heaven.





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Richard
Love poems.
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